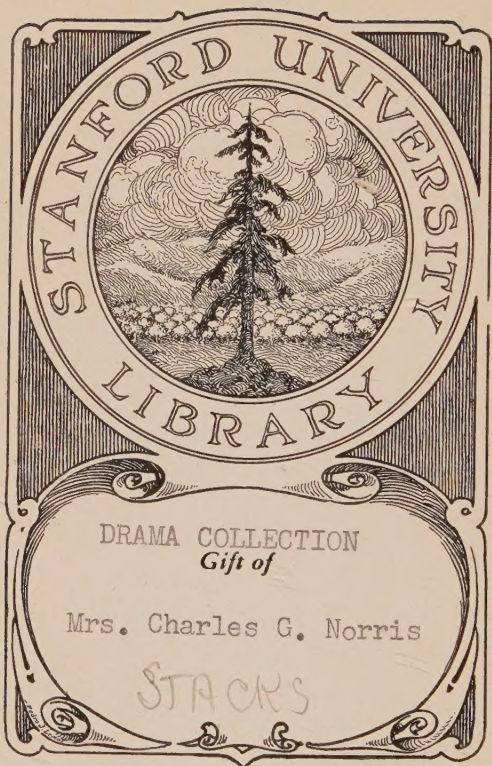


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A SPLENDID GYPSY:  
JOHN DREW





A SPLENDID GYPSY:  
JOHN DREW

*By* PEGGY WOOD



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E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY  
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## FOREWORD

THIS book does not pretend to be a life or history of John Drew, for the author is hardly equipped for that delightful task, but makes its bow bashfully as a record of the great actor's last grand tour of the country, that tour over a route so familiar to him and so strange to the younger generation of the theater to whom "the road" is a prehistoric thing mentioned mainly by books and members of the Players Club.

So many people living along the line of our coast-to-coast tour wanted to know how it felt to travel around the country "with all those stars," how old Mrs. Whiffen really was, and what Mr. Drew was like close-to that it became almost imperative in self-defense to

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write the answers out where all could read. Thus the lives and wanderings of the "Trelawney of the Wells" company found their way into print.

That this record became in the writing more and more a log of "Mr. Drew's company" is why it is called "A Splendid Gypsy" and not something else; and perhaps you, dear reader, if you were one of those who wanted to know what he was like, may find something in it to give you a small idea of how he looked to one who was fortunate enough to be a member of that company. Skip the parts about the rest of us, if you care to, we shan't feel a bit hurt, but wherever you see the name of John Drew jump out of the page as you cast a cursory eye over this little book, do stop and read. He is gone and we shall look long and far before we see his like again, but perhaps a phrase or a paragraph here may help to keep

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his memory green with you. And if you never saw him at all perhaps these pages may convey a little of the flavor of his personality, or a sense of his art.

Yet how can I presume any words of mine could succeed in either of those lofty missions? No, the best thing is to leave it to your taste and tender mercies. Here is what happened during the last engagement of John Drew, the Dean of the American Theater, the last of the theater's Golden Age when glamour was glamour—here it is. I hope you will like it.

PEGGY WOOD.

Springdale, Connecticut,  
November, 1927.



## A SPLENDID GYPSY: JOHN DREW

I HAD heard tales of all-star productions before—wolf stories of old-timers hogging scenes while the youngsters didn't dare peep for fear of hurting the older actors' feelings; terrible rows over dressing-rooms and scenes over who was to have which drawing-room on trains. So it was with some trepidation I took Miss Pauline Lord's place as Imogen Parrot in the revival of *Trelawney of the Wells* when it left for the gala tour after seven tremendously prosperous weeks at the New Amsterdam Theater last spring.

Six weeks was at first to constitute the tour, ending in Chicago, Easter week. "But," said Mr. Tyler, "I have just had a great idea, and if Mr. Drew and Mrs. Whiffen agree, we may do a whirlwind tour to California and back



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by the middle of June, sweeping across the whole country."

"Do you think they will consider undertaking such a trip?" I asked.

"Well," he chuckled, "I was afraid to give a Washington's Birthday matinée for fear it might be too much for them, but of all the company they alone protested, and we played it. They may be game for this."

Now, as Mr. Drew was seventy-three and Mrs. Whiffen eighty-two, this tour sounded pretty formidable in spite of the assurance of a private-compartment car which we were to use as a hotel on wheels during the one-night stands. But I reckoned without two regular troupers to whom the click of the trucks of a transcontinental train was as sugar and cream to a bowl of cereal.

"California? Seattle? Vancouver? Why not?" said they.

So bookings were arranged, and on March

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twenty-first we ushered in our famous tour and the vernal season in Boston. It was a real New England spring day—snow and sleet. All the cast concerned in scenes with me were called to rehearse, for I was to enter the play that night, and, in spite of the weather, they were there. They must have cussed me out privately, but they were all there; and I had my first taste of the real teamwork and unostentation of the “greatest aggregation of stars ever assembled.”

My interpretation differed considerably from Miss Lord's, and they had been accustomed to her for many weeks, yet never once did they show annoyance at what must have been disturbing to them—difference in pace, in volume, in characterization, in all the little things so thoroughly upsetting in a smooth-running play.

Mr. Drew sat at the prompt table watching me during that final rehearsal, and that I

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seemed to win his approbation gave me courage to face the ordeal of casting myself into that group of personalities big enough to clash, but to clash in such a way as to strike fire in a performance.

It was then and there I got the feeling that this was no ordinary all-star spring revival. This was an all-star cast, yes, but topped and headed by John Drew. Somehow it was his company. Not by any assumption of extra authority—on the contrary, he made a point of being only one of a cast—not because he had been the head of his own companies for so many years that the throne was the proper place for him, for there were others there who held that right in years and distinguished service; not because he was called the dean of American actors by the press everywhere, but because of an indefinable something which drew to itself homage, admiration, humility—the recognition of greatness.

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I remember years ago William Sampson, the incomparable father in *The First Year* and a fine character actor, who had been at Daly's with John Drew and Ada Rehan, said to me, "A lot of people consider John Drew mostly as a sartorial delight and tell you they'd rather see him draw on a glove than any other actor play Hamlet. Let me tell you, my lady, you get on that stage with him and see how much more there is to it than drawing on a glove!"

"And a fat chance of my ever doing that," I sighed. But the gods were kinder to me than I dared hope, for they fixed it so my play would flop in time for me to join *Trelawney* to occupy that delightful position. I there had occasion to recall Billy Sampson's remark many times.

Among the younger crowd, we found ourselves marveling perhaps more than the older members of the cast, who were long ago made familiar with that effortless, vibrant voice, so

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seemingly slurred in diction, yet so bitingly clear even to the last row in the house, that intuitive yet sharply intelligent timing which made his points, that ever-changing yet never varying method of attack, always newly colored with some Drew *arrière-pensée*, yet ever the same characterization, prismatic in the changing light, yet clear as crystal.

Eric Dressler, playing Arthur Gower, told me the second act was always a joy to him in spite of the fact he thought Arthur a dreadful sap, because of Mr. Drew's performance each night. And he found he waited nightly for the chill which involuntarily went down his spine when old Sir William Gower ordered his grandson to the library for a bad quarter of an hour with an ominous "Now!"

We marveled, too—and adored—his running fire of *sotto voce* comment throughout the play, mostly caustic, usually witty, yet never interfering with his playing. The weather, the



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audience, the town, the idiosyncrasies of his fellow-artists, whether or not Lawrence D'Orsay would get a hand on his first speech, how he felt—all these were woven into an amusing lining to the garment he showed the footlights. Effie Shannon used to say his comments, while supposedly asleep under a newspaper, used to tax her control to the point of explosion.

To those actors who take themselves, their moods and their art so seriously on the stage, what a shock he would have been! But, after all, it is only those who can walk up to an art and pull its nose who really have any mastery of it.

Boston took to us so kindly we were forced to give an extra matinée, a taste of many to come in our tour as far as Minneapolis, after which, for some reason, business fell off until we reached San Francisco, where we expected to resume extra performances in full force. But there, alas, Mr. Drew was confined to a

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sanitarium, and his absence was not only felt keenly and anxiously backstage but cost the box office about \$10,000 in business and returned seats that week.

We were reminded there once more that it was not for nothing we often got mail on our tour addressed care of John Drew's Company.

For, bill the names as they might, in equal-sized type, his personality and his greatness towered over all in the minds of the public as well as in our own.

In one of the towns in the Middle West two elderly women asked at the box office if Mr. Drew was being starred there that night. They were told Mr. Drew was one of many stars in the cast, but that he was to play there, yes.

That was what they meant. He was playing there; therefore he was starred; the others didn't matter!

From Boston we journeyed to Washington, not, however, in our private-compartment car.

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On this trip I discovered the D'Orsays, Mr. and Mrs., traveled with their entire family—a canary bird, which they had brought all the way from England. Their arrival at the station—in fact, at any station any time along the tour—had caused quite a flurry. It took then, as always, the form of a procession; first came a redcap staggering under many English kit bags, then Mrs. D'Orsay with the bird, and about ten feet back of her Mr. D'Orsay with a bouquet of flowers. For the famous Earl of Pawtucket, on and off, always, as J. M. Kerri-gan put it, contrived to dress as if he were merely passing through. And from the early spring tulips of St. Louis, our farthest South, to the golden Scotch broom of Vancouver, he was never without his shower bouquet at a rail-way station.

“The last of the comedians,” Mrs. D'Orsay says he is.

It is an old saying in the theater that you

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can get away with murder in New York, but on the road they find you out; so it was with tremendous interest I watched, as a newcomer, individualities and personalities emerge from behind the whiskers of amenities.

By this time we had discovered a foursome of bridge players, and part of that particular long trip was whiled away by dint of upturned suitcases and ostentatious refraining from peeking at one another's cards in a steep game at a tenth of a cent a point.

Effie Shannon, one of the four, told me how years ago she used to play poker on long jumps with Mrs. Whiffen and Daniel Frohman, and long after she'd be worn out, Mrs. Whiffen would still be going strong. Mr. Frohman refused to play for money, so they played far into the night for coffee beans! The picture of Dan Frohman buying a bank at the corner grocery in Des Moines has its high lights!

John Kellerd, having learned bridge during

## John Drew

the winter, was most eager to exercise his new social asset and made a most interesting partner—short on rules, perhaps, but long on memory. Endowed with a naturally keen mind, which misfortune had not dulled, and an unexpected wit, which he could turn on himself as well as others, we admired him for his courageous fight against the real adversity of late years.

I reminded myself that this was the man who had played *Hamlet* a hundred nights on Broadway, beating Booth's record. And that he and Effie Shannon had played together once before, years ago, in that great success, *Shenandoah*, when her blond beauty, so fresh and lovely still, first received the delighted applause of an audience who found she could act as well. But I was surprised to learn he had made his debut at Sadler's Wells in London—the "Wells" Pinero means in *Trelawney of the Wells*.



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By the time I joined the troupe they already had their legends, not the least of which was Wilton Lackaye's famous line about concessions. There was a monster audience in front one night in New York and Henrietta Crosman said to Mr. Lackaye, "Don't you wish you had a percentage of that gross?" It was our mutual joke that we were all playing under cut salaries.

"Haven't you?" asked Lackaye, wide-eyed.

"No, I haven't!" Then, as a suspicion raised its head that perhaps he had made a better bargain than she, "Do you mean to say you have?"

"Well, no," drawled Lackaye. "George Tyler and I couldn't come to an agreement on percentage, but he did allow me the concessions."

"What concessions?" asked Miss Crosman.

"The wheel-chair concessions!"

In Washington, President and Mrs. Cool-

## John Drew

idge came to our opening with their son, and the President astounded us by upsetting all the traditions—he both laughed and applauded.

Later the story went around that Mr. Drew saw him next day and was greeted with these words: “Well, Mr. Drew, I never expected to see you again.”

Here Mr. Drew was persuaded by resident photographers to sit for some new pictures, and among his other activities, including special matinées and much social life, he managed to find time to do so. As soon as the proofs came he surprised me by sending them to my dressing-room, asking me to show them to Helen Gahagan and between us to decide which we thought the best looking. We were, of course, touched and charmed at his request, and chose several, one of which we assured him made him look quite the *jeune premier*.

“That’s the one we’ll have, then,” he replied, beaming at the phrase.

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And weeks later, in Vancouver, on the last day he played on any stage, he sent me one of the *jeune premier*, his latest photograph. He telephoned in the morning, with his usual thoughtfulness, to see whether my trunks had gone or not; if not, and I had room for it, he would send it down by his valet. You may imagine how I treasure it.

But to return to Washington—which, by the way, the house manager wanted us to do, for we played to the staggering sum of \$45,000 there that week—all the world turned out to see us, and Mr. Drew had to make a curtain speech each night.

How deftly he handled those curtain calls, judging just how many he'd give before capitulating with a speech! You in the audience, he made you work for that speech! The stage manager waited for his signal before ringing the curtain up and down, for Mr. Drew never tried to run up a large tally for the office re-

port, but waited until he could keep an audience no longer, making them do the insisting and finally giving in.

Then quietly, not in the vibrant voice of the old Vice-Chancellor but in a more gentle one, he would acknowledge with dignity the plaudits of the people. He disliked speeches and was always embarrassed about them, although he must have made a million more or less in his career. But he usually gave some charming variant of his thanks for their appreciation, saying, no matter how hard he might try to scale the heights of eloquence, "The sum and substance of it all would be from my colleagues and myself simply—we thank you."

We used to wait in the wings to hear him every night, never tiring of seeing and hearing him handle an audience, never once thinking perhaps someone else might make the speech sometime. It was his due and his place as

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head of the company, for we more and more acknowledged that place to him each day of our association.

Here in Washington—forgive me if I can't seem to get this troupe out of Washington; but I was still so new and there were so many impressions crowding in—I discovered Mr. Drew actually did not eat dinner before a performance. I knew, of course, actors were supposed not to indulge in so vulgar a thing as food before playing, but I had never actually seen one who didn't dine; perhaps not at a fashionable hour, but still they do eat. Mr. Drew, however, only had tea and toast before the play, and whatever he liked afterward—steak, lobster, chicken, anything.

Somewhat aghast after a lobster Thermidor, which I watched him consume one night at the Occidental Restaurant, I asked him how he dared go to bed after so heavy a meal.



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"I shan't," he replied. "I shall sit up and read for hours. I always do."

And during the few weeks of our tour I found he read the Ludwig book on *William Hohenzollern*, which he swapped me for my *Napoleon* by the same author—and it had taken me ages to read that—some new books he had stocked up on, always the New York newspapers, all the magazines, especially the *American Mercury*, and everything he could lay his hands on—all this besides his regular activities. And five years ago his sight had been despaired of!

Washington filled our houses with many older folks, some of whom the manager said he hadn't seen in his theater in ten years. And as for Boston, her famous grayheads were out in full force. Mr. Lackaye must have done famously with his concessions there.

But Mrs. Whiffen—no one ever needed a wheel-chair for her. Her first morning in

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Washington she trotted down from her hotel to see the cherry blossoms around the Tidal Basin as a constitutional and next day drove in an open car out to Mount Vernon. There she said an elderly gentleman addressed her as she was leaving with her daughter, Peggy Whiffen, and remarked, "I saw you make your debut as 'Buttercup' in December, 1879."

"Fancy remembering back all those years!" she laughed that night at the theater.

The "Rock of Gibraltar," our stage manager called her. Never did she miss a cue or fumble a line, never vary in the amount of energy she gave to each scene. She was never too tired to run—yes, run—across the stage in the first act to throw open a window and look out on an imaginary Imogen Parrot standing on the doorstep below, while Imogen in the flesh stood in the wings, a little moist about the eyes always at the sight of that tiny figure, in its

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hoop skirts and old-fashioned bonnet, trotting across the stage so gayly and yet so indomitably, indestructible by time.

Her exit in Act III, swinging her skirts in haughty disdain, never failed to get a hearty hand and a gentle "Oh!" from the audience—which was eloquent of the quick tears and laughter in the eyes and hearts of all who saw her.

A wave of tenderness welled over the foot-lights toward that little soul, so dear, so true, so brave, playing every night, at eighty-two, with a youth that is unquenchable.

"You know," John Kellard said one night as he watched her make that exit, "it makes you feel there is something, after all, in right living and doing your job well. There's Mrs. Whiffen; she never was a star in her life; she's always played old ladies—played them well, too—but with not much acknowledgment; yet here she is at the end of her life receiving

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more acclaim than ever and loved as never before."

"Whiffy," was Mr. Drew's name for her, and at the end of the third act he always called her out for her bows with him with a "C'mon. Whiffy!"

And those two, hand in hand, received the roars of applause.

Our next stand, Philadelphia, was just the plain hanging-'em-on-hooks you read about. We felt like *Sunny*, George White's *Scandals*, and *Lulu Belle* all rolled into one, so far as business went. Four matinées that week—two of them regular and two extra. Our manager had asked Mr. Drew if he could stand it.

"Why not? I'm a young man! I can if Whiffy can." Whiffy could and did.

Here Mr. Drew was in his home town, playing again in the city where he had begun his career, fifty-four years before in *Cool as a Cucumber*, at his mother's theater on Arch

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Street. In his curtain speech that night he made a graceful gesture to that memory: "Here where first I tried my 'prenticed hand," we heard him say as we hung over the balcony rails outside our dressing-rooms to listen to the thunders of applause for him.

It crashed through the auditorium of the old Garrick, and rumbled backstage. "'Kruger! Kruger!' Can't you hear them yelling for me?" said Otto. "'We—want—Kruger!'" "

"Fool!" we laughed. He and all of us knew well enough just for whom it was, there and everywhere.

An amusing slant on the public reaction to the all-star aggregation "officially called *Trelawney of the Wells*, but affectionately known as the *Old Folks' Concert Company*," as Wilton Lackaye said, was brought to us one night by Frieda Inescort, heard by her while descending in the elevator of the Bellevue-Stratford.

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Two elderly ladies were talking about the play and how much they had enjoyed it. "But isn't it terrible?" one said. "None of those wonderful actors can get jobs, and they had to get up this company for them, to give them work!"

But here we were three weeks out on the road, and where were the all-star rows? The French say "A fish smells by the head"; could that account for it? Mr. Drew was not soft by any means. His eagle eye missed little, although, as one of us, he never intruded, he spoke his mind when he felt like it, but he didn't row! Then an incident I overheard one night cast a new light on the phenomenon.

John Kellard and Otto Kruger had made an exit together, and, as soon as they were off, Kellard said, "Don't you think you ought to be on a line with me when you hand me that letter? You were way downstage."

Kruger looked at him a moment and then

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burst out laughing. "Listen, old dear," he said, "I would be on a line with you if you didn't walk upstage on me. Don't pull that old gag. I'm too old a hand at it myself."

Kellerd expostulated a moment, then laughed—and that was all there was to it.

"What's the trouble?" I whispered.

"Oh, he just forgot and drifted into old tricks. You know where I am supposed to hand him the letter—shove it under his nose? Well, my position is static in the whole scene, but he can move around, and he's been working farther and farther upstage, trying to get me to turn my back to the audience. But I've simply stood still and stuck the letter out where he ought to be, and to-night he had to come downstage to get it, and it spoiled his act. It's just his old training cropping out, but we'll cure him."

And he did; but not until he had resorted to the device of opening the door at center



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back—for, by this time, Kellerd was against the back wall—and playing upstage of the older man by standing in the open door, ostentatiously closing it as Kellerd moved away.

But there was no clash, no letters to the management—and this might have developed into either—nothing but good-natured kidding.

I began to wonder if some of this lack of friction wasn't also due to Mr. Kruger's methods. He had been warned by all those who had ever played Colpoys to look out for squalls with the company, for, in spite of Pinero's deliberate instructions to be as dreadful as possible, it was traditional the other parts would object. Yet he went conscientiously on, falling off chairs, bouncing bread off his head, kidding pomposity, never slackening, although we all knew how ill he was, sometimes in too much pain to talk to us backstage and facing a siege at the hospital on his return, until he became to us the legendary

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comedian of the stage who makes us laugh, no matter how he feels.

Unable to eat a mouthful of the supper served in the first act, he amused himself and us by carving animals out of the bananas—supposed to be potatoes—pigs and police dogs, mice and owls, with eyes and tongues of tiny slices of ham!

Again it was he who solemnly convinced Helen Gahagan, before leaving New York, that we should all have to parade every day before the show with banners, that that was what they always did with all-star troupes.

More and more our idiosyncrasies appeared as we became a really traveling group, but as Mr. Lackaye said to the Drama League, he wouldn't call us "just a happy family, for you all know what families are!"

Whatever or whoever was the reason for this miracle, I don't really know, but we were all still speaking at the end of the tour.

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Before leaving Philadelphia I'd like to add that Mr. Drew told me he was staying over on the Sunday to go out and see his grandniece, Miss Ethel Barrymore Colt, perform in a school function, "for," he said, smiling, "they all tell me she's pretty good."

Baltimore, our next stop, gave us a taste of the spring we were to follow to the Pacific Northwest, keeping pace with the tulips and lilacs as they bloomed their way north. I've always wanted to make an epicurean journey, following the strawberry season from the Gulf to Canada. The Grand Tour didn't exactly fulfill that ambition, but I can truthfully say I've had enough asparagus for once.

Mrs. Whiffen's rooms at the hotels were besieged by women who wanted to see her or talk to her on the telephone. Peggy Whiffen was sometimes exasperated to the point of justifiable homicide.

"Can't I just see her for a moment? Of

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course I've never met her, but I just want to shake her by the hand. Is she really as old as the papers say? I'd love to have her to dinner. We'll get her to the theater on time, but so many of my friends want to meet her."

And so on, until Peggy said the only word she knew in the English language was "No!" It is only her eternal vigilance which keeps her mother from being torn to shreds by curious women.

One thing, though, could not be escaped—autographs. Drove of schoolgirls with memory books, old-timers with programs of the first Trelawney cast, stage doormen with autographs of Fanny Davenport, Booth and Bernhard, theater enthusiasts with elaborate scrapbooks, bound copies of the play—all open for us please to sign our names if it wouldn't be too much trouble. One woman proudly told us she had 450 autographs, including seven Pres-

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idents, and had shaken hands with them all. Our hands had to be shaken too.

Once, during the supper scene, a piece of bread bounced off the stage into the lap of a man sitting directly in front of the footlights—for the orchestra had been removed to make room for extra chairs—and Mr. Lackaye said aloud wearily, "Tell him to send it round and we'll autograph it!"

Why they wanted our scrawls, I don't know. What can you say when somebody shows you someone else's signature anyway? "Yes, very nice"—and then what? Surely they had no idea we would ever bring four cents in an auction room. There were no Gwinnetts, God knows, among us.

But I suppose they collected those for the same reason they came to see us at all. For I have no illusions that the great majority came to see the play; they came to get a bargain and were surprised to get a performance.

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I really think that was why they exclaimed so much about us; they were amazed to find the play and the players interesting. And all for the price of a good musical show.

It is pleasant, though, to think of the young movie-educated things who discovered John Drew. Talk about your peak in Darien!

Pittsburgh was our next stand before Chicago, but nothing of importance occurred there except a record-breaking matinée—\$6000 I think it was.

It was Easter morning when our compartment car, which took us from there on across the country, pulled into Chicago, and as Mr. Drew came through the corridor, up bright and early as usual, he asked me if I knew the Russian greeting for Easter.

Before I could answer he kissed me on both cheeks and said with his inimitable smile, "Christ is risen!"

At my hotel later I found, as did all the

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women of the company, a great box of flowers containing his card with that same joyous message: "Christ is risen!"

Chicago met us with a thrilling first-night audience. All our friends turned up in regiments, there was a Drama League luncheon for all of us, clubs fêted Mr. Drew, there were extra matinées and crowds of standees. It was truly a gala week.

The town itself is an exhilarating place, anyway, for all its smoke and dirt. Somehow it is the one city in America truly thrilling, deliberately making itself beautiful, a woman decking herself in buildings, in parks, in boulevards, stretching voluptuously to watch her trailing train of golden sequins along the lake.

Mrs. Whiffen said, "Oh, how different it all is from the first time I saw this city! My dear, I arrived in this town three weeks after the fire!"



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I gasped. Not the Chicago fire, I thought. Frantically I cast about in my mind for dates—a hopeless task for me—1860? No! That was the Civil War. Then 1850? Couldn't be! Mrs. Whiffen came to this country in '68.

She was still speaking—"And I said to the cabman, I said, 'How on earth can you find your way?' There was nothing but chaos in every direction, no streets—nothing."

Was it 1871? That was it! Mrs. O'Leary's cow. I felt a strange, arresting thing happen to me, as if Time had said, "Wait a minute," and laid a hand on my shoulder. This woman, this living, quick-speaking, bright-eyed person before me, had stepped through the still warm cinders of the Chicago fire as a grown woman and was here telling me about it.

Once before, I had felt that curious sensation when I asked Emma Calvé what was, in her estimation, the greatest voice she had ever heard. Without hesitation, that great artist

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answered, "Adelina Patti's." Then, unconscious of her self-flattery, she added, "They used to tell me I had four or five notes in my middle voice like hers." She sang them. "Something like that," she said. And it was as if a door into the past, now irrevocably shut, had swung open for a second, giving a glimpse of something far off and beautiful.

On leaving Chicago we turned our car toward the flood district to go as far south as St. Louis and then zigzag our way back and forth in the Middle West for two weeks of one-night stands. That was the uninteresting part of the trip—dull, hot and, in spots, not too good as to business.

But Springfield, Illinois, stands out mostly in our minds as the place where two girls appeared in the private car, looking for Mrs. Whiffen, who had been spirited out by Peggy, as usual. They were from one of the newspapers and had accosted Mr. Drew at the gate,

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but he had mumbled something about an important engagement at the hotel and fled. Finally they buttonholed Wilton Lackaye. And, after some frightened starts, they propounded this poser:

“To what,” said they, “do you attribute the extraordinary success of this company?”

Somewhat floored, Mr. Lackaye replied that it was hardly his place to speak for the company on so broad a subject. They should have asked Mr. Drew.

“We did,” they piped, “but he seemed to be in a hurry. Do tell us!”

They teased until, at last, most reluctantly, he said, “Well, I’ll tell you. It’s Mrs. Whiffen’s sex appeal!”

The next in our collection came in Louisville, where they were having a convention of the Southern Baptists. One white-tied reverend accosted Mr. Drew in the hotel lobby, introducing himself and saying he’d read about

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him for years, seen his pictures, and so forth, and just wanted to shake his hand. "I'm here with the Southern Baptists, you know."

"Indeed," said Drew. "Is Elmer Gantry here?" He had just been reading Lewis' latest.

"I don't know, Mr. Drew, but I'll try to find him for you," eagerly responded the man.

Before we left the Southern portion of our tour we ran into a spell of heat which, with our heavy hoop skirts, overcoats, tippets and muffs, was no fun. But Mr. Drew gloated over us and told us how he and Whiffy, in the 1915 Players Club revival of *Trelawney*, that dreadful June week, had fooled them all. Everybody stood around waiting for them to collapse, and they had never turned a hair. The rest of the cast caved in, but not they!

Westward from Detroit we turned our faces, making a terrific jump to Madison, Wisconsin, where we routed the stock company out of its home for some obscure reason known only to

## *John Drew*

the booking office, dressed in a heap in the cellar and then doubled back to Milwaukee.

In this journey we traveled as usual in our own car, but since the C. M. & St. P. does not use the Pullman Company cars, but "rolls its own," so to speak, we found, after we had left all our things in the car, expecting to return to it after the play, that the railroad had sent it packing back to Chicago!

Frantic wiring caught it somewhere along the line, and our manager, with the C. M. & St. P. man, came to each of us for an inventory of each compartment. By the time we got back to the station that night, everything had been transferred to one of their cars without a toothbrush mislaid. Miss Crosman even got back a bag of popcorn she had left.

From Milwaukee we again doubled on our tracks, but this time it was really westward ho!—our next stops being St. Paul and Minneapolis.

## *A Splendid Gypsy:*

Almost none of the younger crowd, so recent in theater experience, had been that far West, for the road in the past few years has been pretty slim pickin' and Minnesota is a long way from Broadway; but the older members of the cast were well acquainted in all the big and little cities, where, for years, they had "stood 'em up." Effie Shannon and Henrietta Crosman were greeted by the welcoming applause of people who had been seeing them for years. John Kellard and Wilton Lackaye were vociferously hailed as old friends, no matter where we went. And as for Mr. Drew, everywhere people all turned out to see him.

It was at that first performance in Minneapolis I heard Mr. Drew say to Mrs. Whiffen, as he came round backstage for his cue, "Whiffy, I did an old-man trick to-day—I motored over from St. Paul and wrenched my knee as I stepped out of the car. It hurts like

*John Drew*

the devil, and I creak when I sit down. Makes me furious to limp like this."

Mrs. Whiffen was all birdlike concern and full of remedies, which he promised to apply. Next day he complained a little more, and as he came across stage I noticed he was shaking in a chill.

The theater was damp and cold, and he was dressing in the property room—for there was no other place but the cellar—and I feared he had caught cold, but he assured us later he was quite all right.

Next day we set off on our longest jump west, to Spokane. The bridge players we found by this time numbered exactly seven in the company, and there was considerable dating up beforehand for any of the long train jumps; those who didn't get their fourth, playing three-handed until the fourth from the other group would say, "Sorry, but I promised to play with Rollo and Joe Kerrigan at



## *A Splendid Gypsy:*

three to-day." We hoped Louise Drew, who joined us in Milwaukee to be with her father, would solve the dilemma, but she assured us she had no more card sense than he had, which, she vowed, was none at all.

At stops such as Billings, Montana, and other transcontinental "watering places" we got out to stretch our legs—cast, crew and the D'Orsay bird. At one place Joe Kerrigan more than stretched his, for our carpenter, whose name was Wyahlllyeth—like trying to say something through a yawn—told him there were two real Indians at the other end of the platform, whereupon that stocky little Irishman ran as fast as his legs would go, to get a look at them. He had seen a cowboy that morning, and this made his day complete. The mountains, the sagebrush, the great yellow Yellowstone River—all were an adventure to that delightful Celt, who, with his bunkie, O. P. Heggie, spent

## *John Drew*

most of the day with his nose pressed against the car window.

Mr. Drew visited up and down the car, calling on Mrs. Whiffen, as was his custom on every jump, and stopping for a word with each of us. Once he got out to stretch the knee, which was still bothering him, and held his wrist up to the healing sunlight, for he said it also pained him now.

"But this is nonsense," he added. "I never had rheumatism in my life!"

Next day in Spokane we were disturbed to hear it had taken three people to assist him from his cab. On questioning him that night, he admitted he felt pretty achy. Then, characteristically, he grinned and added, "I shan't have to assume my old-man walk for Sir William to-night." For he always bent his knees a little to simulate the walk of a very old gentleman.

## *A Splendid Gypsy:*

Here, at Spokane, I must add, was the one bright spot of the tour in the life of the D'Orsay bird. At the Davenport Hotel there—an enchanting spot if ever there was one—the lobby is filled with rare and exotic song birds in gorgeous cages among palms and greenery. They were not noisy canaries or parrakeets, nor these big banana-billed toucans that squawk so raucously, but beautiful things with soft, divine notes. Mrs. D'Orsay hung Peter Pan down there with them. A day's respite from trains that bumped and jammed enough to throw a poor bird off his perch and break his leg! Transcontinental traveling for birds is pretty tough going.

At Seattle, Bee Drew, as she is affectionately called by all, overrode her father's opposition and called a doctor. And that night Uncle John told Whiffy, as he waited for his entrance in the third act, "The doctor says it's acute arthritis, and that time I thought I

*John Drew*

wrenched my knee was really a twinge. That's what Ethel had, you know." By Ethel he meant Miss Barrymore.

We were all concerned and relieved to hear a nurse had been engaged to give him treatment.

Gallant gentleman that he was, he was much perturbed to find Mrs. Whiffen had to walk up a flight of stairs to her dressing-room—the theater wouldn't run the elevator except for trunks, of course—and insisted he must change with her in spite of his bad knee!

It was here we decided to have a company party on our free Sunday evening in Victoria, British Columbia, and put up a message on the call board to that effect. Mrs. Whiffen was the first to say she'd come, but Mr. Drew, after advice, decided he'd better rest for the Monday performance. The rest of the cast all accepted—it was to be Dutch treat, of course—and we planned a simple party. We knew the

## *A Splendid Gypsy:*

tour would be so soon over now, that San Francisco and Los Angeles would be full of friends claiming the time and attention of us all, that we'd never have another good chance really to get together. And, as I have remarked, we were all friends and we were even all speaking to one another!

But here the first shadow of approaching tragedy reached us, and it was my fate to be the unwilling witness of its onslaught. Coming downstairs for a scene in the third act, my maid maneuvering the great red taffeta hoops around the sharp corners, I arrived at the stage floor and glanced in at the open door of Mr. Drew's dressing-room, where he was always to be seen reading, for he had a long wait offstage. But this time my heart stood still, for as I looked I saw that his paper was sliding from his lap and he himself was slipping unconscious to the floor.

Emmett, his colored valet, rushed to the tap

## *John Drew*

for water, then back again, trying to keep Mr. Drew from falling. Quickly I turned and sent my maid for aromatic spirits of ammonia, but Estelle Winwood's maid, who was just back of us, ran like lightning to her room, a flight nearer, and was back quickly with ammonia and camphor, which she applied as smelling salts, while Emmett got the aromatic ammonia down.

I ran backstage and sent for Mr. Király, our manager, for I knew Mr. Drew had an entrance in ten minutes, and if he couldn't make it somebody would have to tell the audience why. Then I found the stage manager, and we got Emmett off for Bee, the doctor and Peter Heggie, who was to play Sir William in case of Mr. Drew's illness.

By this time he had regained consciousness and asked the maid what she was doing there, and where was Emmett. Quickly she answered he had sent Emmett out for news of the fight

## *A Splendid Gypsy:*

—didn't he remember? It was the night of the Sharkey-Maloney fight.

"Oh, yes—oh, yes," he said. "Who won?"

My own entrance curtailed any further activities on my part, and I went on, weak in the knees, thinking of everything but my lines: Would Mr. Király be in the wings in time to go on and announce the news to the audience, or would they ring down the curtain? Had they found O. P. Heggie, who was through after the first act? Rollo Peters, unmindful of what was happening backstage, must have thought he had a madwoman playing with him.

At last my exit came and I stumbled off. Where was Király? I ran toward the dressing-rooms. They had found Bee, who was getting the doctor, Mr. Király was in the doorway—and Mr. Drew was dressed and on his way to play his scene!

Dumfounded at his recovery, his indomitable will power to go on, we listened to his



## *John Drew*

lines come, almost as strong as usual. We dared a look from the tormenter—he was sustaining himself against the table, with a shaking hand, but that voice did not shake, nor did he lose a line. Silently we looked at one another, long looks, and turned our eyes away, not daring to speak. He finished the performance as usual.

Next day he was much, much better and scoffed at his sickness, so we made our boat trip to Victoria light-heartedly. That voyage was like a week-end excursion, and we were as excited as if we were setting off for Japan. The Olympic range on the United States side shone silver-topped, while, on the Canadian shore, the rocks and headlands were golden in Scotch broom.

But our landing and first sight of Victoria itself I shall never forget—the sunshine pouring down on the fresh, green, gorgeous flowers—never have I seen such flowers—the ivy-

## *A Splendid Gypsy:*

covered hotel with its charming gardens of may trees, as they call the hawthorn there, and holly; so quaint, so British, that Frieda Inescort broke down and cried with homesickness!

After arranging for the company party, several of us got cars and went out to Butchard's Gardens, as we were warned on the call board not to miss them. Peter Heggie and Otto Kruger found their golf course as usual, and we all scattered, only to assemble that night in the lobby, each gasping, "If you'd only been with us, to see what we saw!" For the glories of gardens the like of which we'd none of us seen in America or Europe; the beauties of a golf course like Mid-Ocean in Bermuda, only with rich, springy turf and masses of flowers along the fairways and bunkers; the sea, and across the blue water the white-capped Olympics—were beyond description, and we could only explain them in gasps.

## *John Drew*

By the time we had run out of adjectives our private room and dinner were ready, and we corralled the rest of the gypsies. Bee Drew left us, saying she would love to come, but that she was going to dine upstairs with her father.

About ten minutes later she called me on the phone and said, "Papa wants to know if you can have two extra places laid without any trouble. He wants to come to the party."

Could we? Well, rather! And rousing cheers greeted his appearance. We knew how he loved a party, and Bee whispered to us, "He just couldn't bear to miss this one!"

So, with John Drew at the head of our table and Mrs. Whiffen at the foot, twenty of us sat down to dinner, for the manager and even the boy who sold programs were there. Kruger brought his portable phonograph and we danced—Mrs. Whiffen too! We laughed, we told stories, we talked shop, we were show

## *A Splendid Gypsy:*

folks among our own—gypsies, Pinero calls us. It is a very happy memory.

Next day found us exploring the shops, and how individualities came out in our tastes in shops! J. M. Kerrigan always studied the newspapers in every new town for second-hand bookstores, but here he made his greatest haul—two copies of first edition Conrad for thirty cents apiece! The last quotation was in the hundreds of dollars, I believe. And he also found a book on David Garrick by Tom Robertson, the original of Tom Wrench in *Trelawney*, and signed by Robertson himself, which he gave to Rollo Peters as a memento of the town.

Rollo's shopping usually took him in a bee line for the antique stores on a hunt for things for his very old house in Rockland County. Here in Victoria he, too, made a find—a mahogany fire screen with a beadwork dog that he couldn't pack any place. Nobly he carried

## *John Drew*

this the rest of the trip, never trusting a porter, until it became his banner, his device, and we howled whenever it came in sight.

Somehow the Victoria part of the Grand Tour was more like a holiday than any place else. Perhaps it was because of Victoria's birthday and the Empire Day parade; perhaps it was the very English maids and waiters; perhaps it was the real brown bread and butter—not spongy, crumbly Graham bread—with our tea, but somehow we felt as if we'd hopped off this continent with Lindbergh and played a one-night stand in England.

In Vancouver, Mr. Drew was much improved in spirit, although somewhat feebler in body. Once more he began to kid during the performance, once more he waggled his lower jaw at us onstage in seeming ferocity, warning us under his breath to look out for "old man Wobberjaw." Business was rotten, but we didn't care—our Uncle John was better.

### *A Splendid Gypsy:*

We played but three performances there, and, during the third, word went round that Mr. Drew couldn't play the next three days in Portland, but would go on to San Francisco, have the abscessed teeth, that were poisoning him, out, and open in San Francisco with us. We were so relieved to have him take this rest, and O. P. Heggie was most willing to take the burden of Sir William off his shoulders.

Then, a moment later, those playing in scenes with him began to come off, looking serious and saying that Mr. Drew was wretched to-night—worse than ever. He had started the performance in his old spirit, but his wrists were swelling visibly and rapidly, and he seemed suddenly to grow old and thin and gray before our eyes. Each speech was harder, more effort, slower, as if he gathered his forces from far off and it took a long time to marshal them. Should we break in and take the burden of the speech from him? Our hearts said,

## *John Drew*

“Yes! Save him!” Our heads didn’t dare. He was king and captain; who were we to intrude? At the end of the third act with Helen Gahagan, Rollo Peters and me on the stage with him, he was so weak I felt as if we were holding him up with our eyes alone, that if we took them away for an instant he would fall.

Anxiously we rang up on the fourth act, playing as quickly as we could to get him home to bed, helping him in all the little ways we knew, loving him. He did not raise his eyes now from the floor and played as if by reflex. Effortless—indeed, there was no strength now for any effort—that voice still cut through bitingly to the last row. His technic carried him through the words and the motions of the part he loved.

Perhaps we showed our concern to the audience—I don’t know. I hardly know anything about that performance except the picture of

## *A Splendid Gypsy:*

Kerrigan coming off, fighting back the tears, crying, "It's—it's too much!" and one dramatic moment at Mr. Drew's exit in the middle of the act.

"Obleege me with your arm, sir," says Sir William to Wrench. "I'll go to my box." And goes offstage.

There was never applause on this exit that I can remember, but that night, as he moved slowly off into the haloing light of a 1000-watt lamp, my heart said to me, "Be still. You are seeing John Drew make his last exit." The audience must have felt it, too, for an electric something seemed to pass through it, hushing it for a long moment. Then came a thundering round of applause, as if they were saying, "Well done, sir! Hail and farewell!"

That was his last performance on any stage. And though I didn't hear it, he did not leave without a flicker of his old self, sick as he was, for Eric Dressler, much nearer to him than I,



## *John Drew*

told me he heard him add, "I'll go to my box, sir—my wooden box."

But next day, on the train, he was again better and sputtering against his enforced lay-off. "Here am I," he raged, "incapacitated—a—a sick man. And look at her!" He pointed an accusing finger at Mrs. Whiffen, fresh as a cricket.

We left him at the station in Portland, where he changed trains to go on to San Francisco. And that was the last any of us saw of John Drew, for when we arrived in San Francisco we found, contrary to our hopes, that he would not be able to open with us. John Kelder made the announcement to the audience, adding that we expected to have him back again during the week. But things took a more serious turn. The septic poisons had attacked his heart, he was running a high temperature, and we none of us were allowed to see him.

O. P. Heggie carried on as Sir William, for,

## *A Splendid Gypsy:*

as Mr. Drew said, "The show must go on." Heggie gave a delightful performance, but was utterly miserable playing the part. For it was he who had insisted to George Tyler, in the beginning, that Uncle John was the only man to play the rôle, and had managed to effect an engagement after Drew had declined Mr. Tyler's proposition. Sadly, indeed, did Peter Heggie array himself in the trappings of his dear friend.

What happened from then on is somehow of little moment; the Grand Tour was over. Mr. Drew did not rejoin us, and it was with heavy hearts we went on to Los Angeles without him. The handwriting was on the wall; we all read it clearly.

There had been talk of additional weeks in Chicago and Cleveland after the stated tour, But these were now canceled. A great many of the cast wanted to take them over co-operatively, but what was the use? The head and

## *John Drew*

mainstay was not there; and we might say we were an all-star cast till we were blue; the fact remained we were Mr. Drew's company.

And proudly I shall bear that title all my days. I shall always remember that it was my privilege to get on that stage with him, as Billy Sampson said, in this, his last tour. This sweep of the country from Boston to Vancouver, flinging in a last gesture, broad as those he used on the stage, a fine farewell in one of the great performances of the American theater.

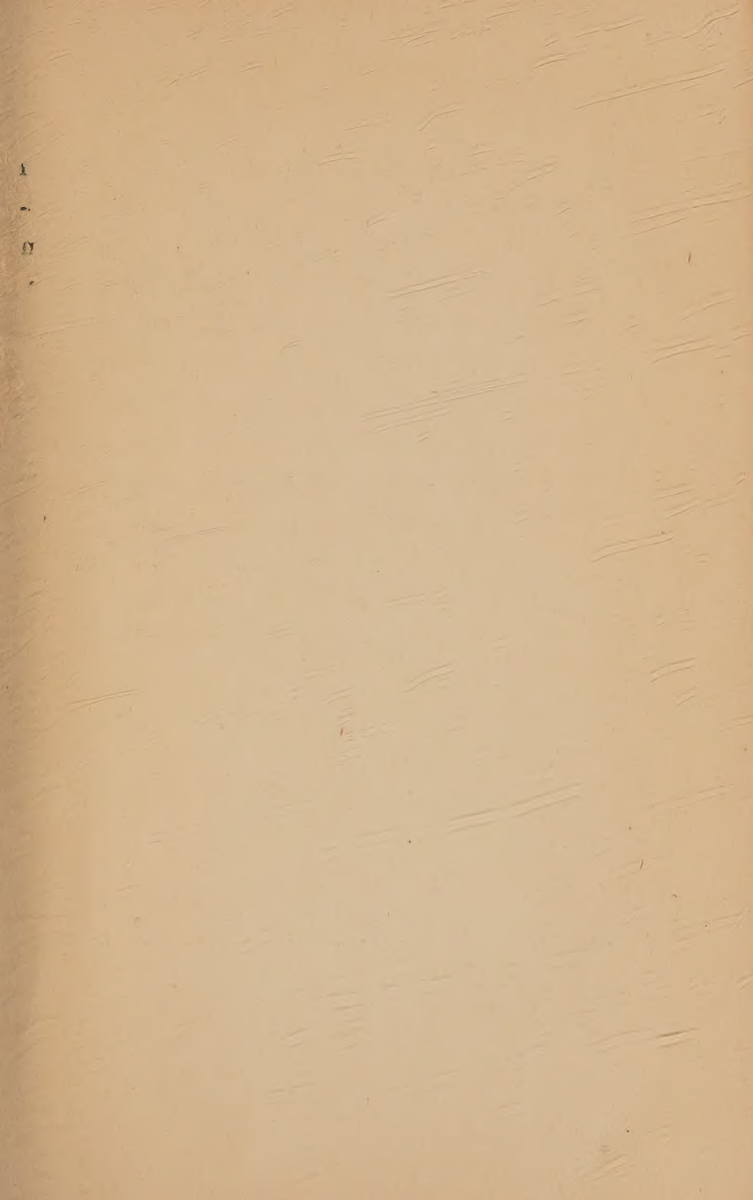
Anxiously we scanned the papers each day, dreading the inevitable news which has come now, as I write.

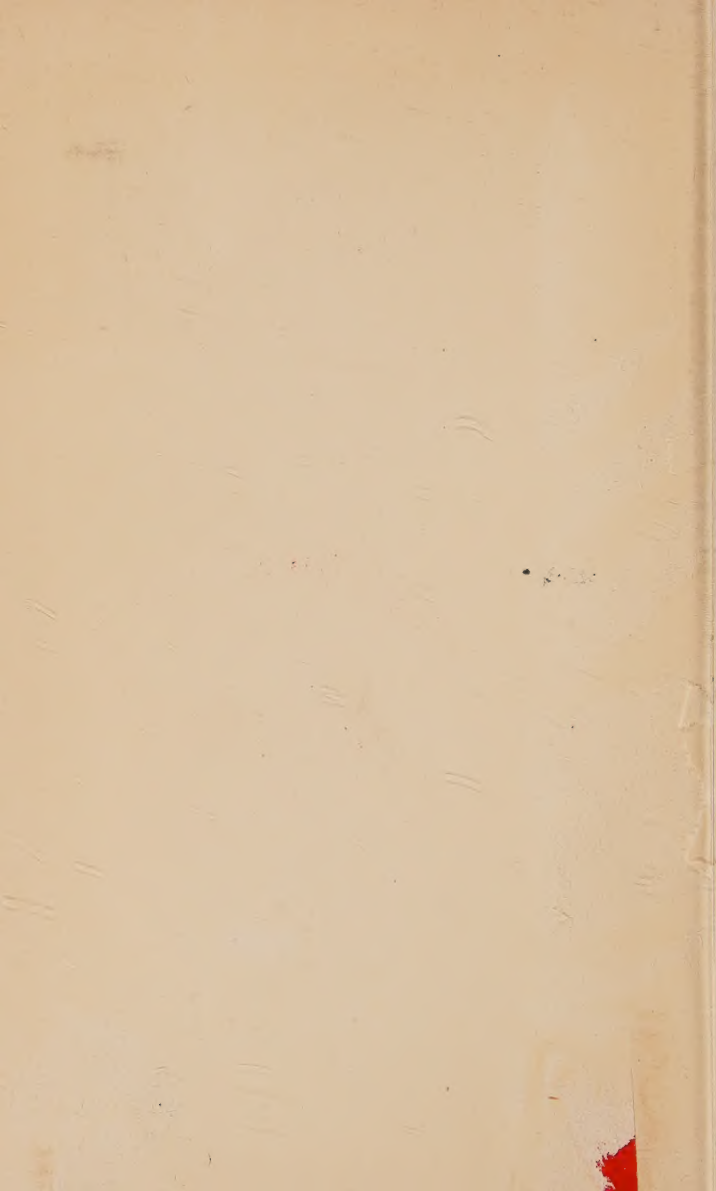
I know each one of us of that company has let the tragic words fall slowly to his lap and, with dimmed eyes, looked back over these past weeks. I can hear Matty, the property man, now saying, "I been wit' them all, and I tell you John Drew's got class. There's a real guy."

### *A Splendid Gypsy:*

And George, the electrician, who had beer with him for years—I suspect he got his passion for shirts from Mr. Drew—I can see him shake his head in sorrow. “John Drew is gone. When shall we see his like again?”

A great actor, a fine friend, a gallant gentleman. And, in the words of Sir William Gower describing Kean, the idol of his youth, those words we heard him say so many times, “He was a splendid gypsy!”





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